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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6075

March 11, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
White House Coronavirus Task Force
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Benjamin S. Carson, Sr., M.D.
Secretary
United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 Seventh Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Vice President Pence, Secretary Carson and Secretary Perdue:

In light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, I am writing to express my concern about the health and well-being of the millions of families and individuals residing in federally-assisted housing. I am requesting that the White House Coronavirus Task Force, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) coordinate to provide guidance to operators of federally-assisted housing properties, which are home to millions of people who are vulnerable to the health and economic shocks of the COVID-19 outbreak. Additionally, I urge you and your team to engage with residents, owners, and managers of federally-assisted housing to inform your assessment of the needs of both families and providers.

HUD and USDA assist over 5.2 million households and 10.4 million individuals through rental assistance programs¹. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), older adults and people with serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19². Over half of the

¹ <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/12-10-19hous-factsheet-us.pdf>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

households living in federally-assisted properties are headed by a person who is elderly or disabled and could fall into this high-risk category as defined by the CDC³.

We have seen the spread of the virus at a Seattle-area nursing home, which has health professionals on staff⁴. HUD-assisted and USDA-assisted properties have many similarly situated residents without dedicated health care professionals on site to support residents in the event of an infectious disease outbreak. Research from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) found that HUD-assisted Medicare and Medicaid enrollees are significantly more likely to have five or more chronic conditions than Medicare and Medicaid enrollees without federal housing assistance. In the case of coronavirus infection, mandatory quarantine, or voluntary isolation, these at-risk residents will require food, access to medication, and resources to assist with the prevention of further outbreak. Coordinated guidance is needed to ensure residents of these federally-assisted communities receive these necessities. Additionally, operators and staff of federally-assisted properties will require specific guidance on how to communicate with residents about quarantine and mitigate risk of further exposure, and guidance on how to prevent spread of infections given in-building space constraints and available prevention resources.

One potential example of such specific public health guidance is HUD's effort to provide infectious disease information and toolkits to homeless providers that receive Continuum of Care and Emergency Solution Grant funding. This material provides specific guidance to help local providers prevent and manage the spread of infectious diseases among people experiencing homelessness. Of course, we know that families and individuals experiencing homelessness would be better able to manage their health and avoid infectious diseases if they have access to appropriate, permanent housing - a goal that we should be working toward.

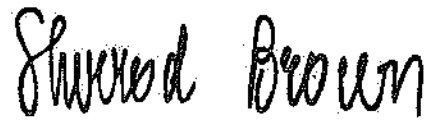
I also request that you complete an assessment of the needs of families and providers participating in federal housing assistance programs during this public health emergency and brief my staff on your findings. In addition to guidance, the Administration must provide necessary resources help housing and homeless providers. The Administration must work with families experiencing financial stress and housing operators affected by the loss of revenue because of the loss of work due to quarantines or business interruptions. It is imperative that the Administration prevent the eviction of families and mitigate the financial stress of property owners and operators that are affected by coronavirus.

³ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/most-rental-assistance-recipients-work-are-elderly-or-have-disabilities>

⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/08/politics/coronavirus-washington-nursing-home-life-care-center-kirkland-cnntv/index.html>

The federal government has a duty to ensure that families and individuals in federally-assisted housing are protected and supported during this public health emergency. You must also take all necessary steps to prevent evictions and an increase in homelessness because of this public health emergency. I look forward to working with you to ensure this is the case and I look forward to receiving your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sherrod Brown". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Sherrod" and last name "Brown" clearly distinguishable.

Sherrod Brown
Ranking Member